



BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination – An NGO for the Protection of Pollinators

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BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination is a European NGO focusing on environmental issues that affect pollinators, with special attention to bees, continuously working for their protection. As colony mortality and collapse of insect populations continued to spread around Europe, beekeepers and beekeeping associations began to improve their collaborations to fight some of the causes and to counter their effects. Along with a few open-minded scientists, they realised that the real environmental issues were often masked as problems specific to beekeeping, such as parasites and pathogens. However, high toxicity in the environment from intensive pesticide use and other unsustainable farming practices were and continue to be a main challenge for bees and pollinators in general. Therefore, collaborators from several European countries came together in 2013 to formally create the NGO BeeLife, to advance their joint efforts to improve environmental conditions for bees and biodiversity. Since its registry, it has been working at the European level to improve conditions for bees and pollinators in general. BeeLife stands on the ground that bees have an intrinsic value and that they play an essential role in the balance of ecosystems, of livelihood and cultural heritage, thus meriting protection. Bees not only pollinate and are necessary for our food security and healthy environments, they also have an important role in culture and identity.

The Coordination is formed by over 20 beekeeping and farming associations from different European countries. Since its creation, it has been working on several essential dossiers for bees such as pesticide authorisation and use; GMOs or veterinary product authorisation; developments of the Common Agricultural Policy; defending the 2013 neonicotinoid partial ban in the Bayer and Syngenta vs European Commission case, and even co-organising the Bee Week at the European Parliament, among other activities.

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Pesticide Use and Authorisations

The problems that bees and beekeepers face in the field is a consequence of deficiencies in the legal framework. Since 2009, even before it was officially formalised, BeeLife works for the improvement of the pesticide authorisation process. Mainly, BeeLife advocated for measuring the impact of pesticides on bees, and its inclusion as a criterion during their pre-market evaluation.

A notable example of the pesticide dossier in BeeLife has been the neonicotinoid insecticides family. Given their devastating effect on bee health, BeeLife directed a large part of its efforts on supporting a ban on neonicotinoids. From 2013 until the EU ban on 2018, it collaborated with other organisations throughout the Save the Bees Coalition. Such type of collaborations is necessary due to the high costs and efforts necessary to produce effective change. It currently follows the development of other pesticide-related issues, including the emergency authorisations on neonicotinoids that continue to affect bees in some European countries. BeeLife is also a current member of the European Citizen Initiative Campaign “Save Bees and Farmers”, with the objective of transforming European agriculture into a bee-friendly one, with particular attention for a healthy environment.

In its efforts for having a safer environment, BeeLife takes part in Advisory Committees of the Directorate General of Health and consumers (the EU Ministry of Health), which are composed by stakeholders in the field of public and environmental health. It is in these committees that issues related to bee health, pesticides, veterinary products, biocides, or GMOs are discussed.

BeeLife also calls for transparency in the discussions and negotiations taking place within the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (known as SCoPAFF). This committee, made up of experts sent by the Member States, decides, in the context of its meetings on pesticides, to renew the marketing authorisations for active substances.

European agriculture and policies that influence the environment

We take an active role in the discussion of the future of the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and raise awareness on the insect pollinators needs and interactions with agriculture among different collectives present in the rural areas. It participates to the civil dialogue groups (CDGs) dynamised by the Directorate General of Agriculture and Rural Development, gathering the views from stakeholders linked to agriculture. Besides, it has



direct contact with various Members of the European Parliament to influence future legislation. BeeLife promotes a safer and more sustainable future for European agriculture. For this purpose, its work includes lobbying, reporting, and collaborations with other NGOs and associations.

The current efforts on the CAP include reaching an effective implementation of the Sustainable Pesticide Use Directive, which will soon be celebrating its 10th anniversary. Its objective is to reduce the risks and impacts of pesticide use on human health and the environment, also to promote Integrated Pest Management with a safer use of pesticides, as well as promoting alternative non-chemical approaches. BeeLife also aims at encouraging exchanges and the sharing of knowledge between beekeepers and farmers. Finally, to take into account the melliferous potential of flower varieties and promote the increase of beneficial food resources to pollinators.

One of the key pillars for BeeLife is the cooperation throughout its network which includes beekeepers, researchers and policymakers. Focusing on the potential that bees have, BeeLife insists on the importance of bees for better understanding the environmental impact by current agricultural practices and policies, as well as from other policies. Its work focuses on spreading this message and positively influence the work of farmers and legislators. It currently promotes the inclusion of a *Pollinator Index* in the reform of the CAP, to measure and improve policies that shape agriculture in Europe.

Innovation and exploring practical solutions

BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination is registered in Belgium as a non-profit association, and its range of activities are non-commercial. However, this does not mean that the NGO is distant from the technological developments in the field of apiculture. It also takes part in [The Internet of Bees](#) (IoBee), a project funded by the European Commission. IoBee is exploring how the applications of new technological developments to beekeeping can help improve bee health by gathering data on colonies and their surrounding environment. Through developments in digital non-invasive beehive monitoring and implementation of satellite imaging, the project is aiming to provide a better understanding of bees and the challenges they face.

BeeLife is also a stakeholder in the EU Bee Partnership, dynamised by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The objective of the partnership is to "improve data collection, management, sharing and communications to achieve a holistic approach to the assessment of



bee health in Europe and beyond". It also looks to develop and promote data standards for bee health and to promote effective solutions to identified problems.

BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination comes from a passionate group that recognises the vital role that bees have in our environment. BeeLife serves as a relay for the concerns and observations that beekeepers share. Their remarks and expertise are essential for the work of the organisation and are the driving force of its efforts. They support the objective of finding practical ways to help improve conditions for bees and, in consequence, other wildlife and humans. Thanks to the sentinel work of beekeepers, BeeLife surveys the risks that bees face; later working to influence policy to improve conditions, and even participating and advancing new ways to help bees and their environment.